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Chargers 2024 NFL Draft Media Availability, Day 2

Friday, April 26, 2024 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

Opening statements:

GENERAL MANAGER JOE HORTIZ: "It was a good Day 2 for us. We're excited to add both [WR] Ladd [McConkey] and [LB] Junior [Colson]. Two players that we think are outstanding players, outstanding people, high-level competitors. They're highly-productive, smart, tough football players. They're just going to make us better. Really excited about both of them and look forward to seeing them here."

HEAD COACH JIM HARBAUGH: "Ladd McConkey, big-time competitor. Junior Colson, big-time competitor. Guys that are there every day. They're at every practice, every game. Really, really excited about how today went."

On McConkey's skillset and how he 'fits in the offense':

HARBAUGH: "Fitting into the offense, versatility. He can be an outside receiver. He can be a slot receiver. Love the speed, 4.38 [40-yard dash], but he plays to it. He plays to that 4.38 every single play, you can see it in the way that he rages off of the ball, and once he has the ball in his hands. Me and Joe [Hortiz] were talking about him, he's very [Raiders TE] Brock Bowers-like with the way that he gets yards after the catch. Competitor, big-time. Those things. He catches the ball. A terrific route-runner. He has the quickness, he has the speed that is going to be great for our offense. I love the guys that can run in the 4.3s."

On if McConkey's size 'will translate to the NFL as an outside receiver':

HORTIZ: "Yeah, I think what he offers is versatility. The way that they used him [at Georgia], he was outside, he was playing Z, he's going against press, he's beating press. Then, they move him into the slot and he has great feel over the middle of the field. You watch him work versus zone and uncovered up the seam. Just a lot of football intelligence in his play that carries over, in both positions."

On 'trading up' to select McConkey:

HORTIZ: "He was the guy that we targeted. He's a guy that all of the scouts targeted. He was a guy that all of the scouts and coaches looked at and all of the scouts and coaches loved. I can say that about both players. We took two players today that, if you look at the grades — which you can't see [laughter] — they're all consensus starter levels, it's kind of the same grade on all of them. Guys that we feel can impact us. He was a guy that was high up on our list. We had some calls to move back and we were called to see if we were interested in moving up and we were able to work out the deal. When we were on the clock, we went for it."

On Colson:

HARBAUGH: "He checks every box. Our scouts, along with Joe [Hortiz] and [Linebackers Coach] NaVorro Bowman, who has played in this league for a long time, had him as the top inside linebacker in the draft. He has the size, he's a downhill backer, but he can also go sideline-to-sideline. He knows the system. A big-time competitor. The thing that stands out in my mind, of all of the times, he broke this year and they were like, 'Are you OK, Junior?' 'I broke my hand.' 'Well, we better go in and get it X-Ray'd.' 'Ah, it's almost halftime, I think I'll just keep playing.' We went in and, sure enough, it was broken. Next thing you know, he's out there playing with a club. More than one-and-a-half hands were in a club for a good part of the season. All of the things — size, speed, athleticism. Instincts, that would probably be the number one thing for an off-the-ball linebacker that plays inside. Tough. I would tell the guys on the team here that here comes another big-time competitor. Competitors welcomed."

On if they were 'surprised' that Colson was still on the board upon the team's third-round selection:

HORTIZ: "We were excited that he was there. We thought that there would be a chance. The position itself is a little undervalued on draft day, so we kind of thought that, maybe, there's a chance. But, percentages, I can't say that it was a high percentage that we thought that he would be there. I was hoping that he would be there, our scouts were hoping that he would be there. I know that coach was hoping that he would be there. But, to say, 'Oh, we knew that he was going to be there.' No. We thought that if we passed him at 37 [overall], we probably weren't going to be getting him at 69. We were just fired up when we had the chance to do it."

On Colson's 'understanding of the system' and the 'value' of that:

HARBAUGH: "He's a MIKE, but he can be a WILL, too. Probably back to the original question about what we liked about him the most, it's how he plays football. He plays football really well, and so does Ladd [McConkey]. Ladd McConkey, really transitioned to be, can he be an outside receiver, can he be an inside receiver? He is showing that he can be an outside receiver. I'm not going to say the names, you're going to know the names, of the guys that were drafted high who play corner who he played against. He won some of those battles in man-to-man coverage. It's just there, it's there on the tape, how they play football."

On McConkey's ability in the middle of the field:

HORTIZ: "When you look at players, especially the ones that work the middle of the field, it's how they feel it. Spatial awareness and the ability to sense defenders, set defenders up. He's so sudden after the catch, getting upfield. Like Coach [Harbaugh] mentioned, he's like a little [Raiders TE Brock] Bowers. Just kind of great bursts upfield, instinct and feel. He does a great job. Those guys that know how to get open, get open, find space and create space. They can just do it and he's one of those guys."

On McConkey's blocking and returning ability:

HARBAUGH: "Punt return. Again, versatility. Outside receiver, inside receiver, punt returner."

HORTIZ: "Blocking is a mentality, as a scout. It's a mentality. You don't have to be some big, physical guy. You just have to care, work at it and care about your teammates. As an evaluator, that's what we do. If you watch him, he gives effort. There are plenty of plays on tape where another one of his teammates is catching the ball or running the ball and he's creating space for them."

On McConkey's durability:

HORTIZ: "He's played three years there. I'm not talking about injuries because of HIPAA. You have what you have, but I know this, our doctors feel great about him. He's been pretty durable there. Certainly, he's had some bumps in the road, but he responded and played late this year. That says something about his commitment to compete and to the team. You see a guy that was most likely coming out [to be drafted] and he's playing in a Bowl game this year. That's impressive to me."

On the linebackers:

HARBAUGH: "To be determined. We really like [LB] Denzel [Perryman]. We like [LB] Daiyan [Henley] a whole heck of a lot, too. We're just beginning to get out there on the field. Those are two really good players as well. You can't have enough good players."

On the number of Michigan players drafted:

HARBAUGH: "It got emotional for me. It really did. The little hairs on the arm were standing up. I'm a Charger, but I mean, those are *my guys*, you know? It's neat. I love seeing some of the records broken — the amount guys that were at the combine, the three players in a row. I don't know if that's ever been done in the draft. To have seven players picked in the first three rounds, that's a first for Michigan. Just so many cool things. I'm telling you, it got emotional in a good way for me."

On managing multiple opinions in the draft process:

HARBAUGH: "The way I was raised by my dad and my mom, when somebody is the expert at what they do, they know the subject matter better than you do. Better than I do. I do what they tell me to do and then I will be successful. That's how I was raised. Joe [Hortiz] is one of the best evaluators in the National Football League. He has been doing it for decades. He does it every day year-round. That's who I listen to. Then, NaVorro, myself, [Defensive Coordinator] Jesse [Minter], the other scouts, the personnel, the Spanos', every one of the coaches on our staff, we're just, 'How can we help?' We're just trying to support and try to help in any way that we can."

On Defensive Coordinator Jesse Minter's reaction to selecting Colson:

HARBAUGH: "He was fired up. He was fired up. Joe [Hortiz] includes us. I mean, he pulls it out of us. I said that yesterday. He does a masterful job of pulling out, involving people. You're involved. You feel like you have a voice. You're able to give your opinion. It just makes you give more. It makes you work harder. It's a master class of leadership to be able to do that and do what he does. It came down to, 'Jesse, who would you rather have? This player or this player?' Jesse said. I mean, I'm not in Joe's mind, but what he would have done had it not been the way he [also] wanted it, I hope he would have gone with what [Minter] wants to do because we trust him. I've seen it on display this entire process. We got a *guy*. We got a *guy* in this guy [Hortiz]."

On McConkey's route running:

HORTIZ: "We were talking about it today. We were watching some film on him. It's one of the things that pop on film. Just how good he is. How he sets up routes. Like I said, spatial awareness, feel, getting off the ball, understanding the releases, understanding when to change gears. He's precise. The quarterback, we talked about it. The quarterback knows where he's going to be. You're going to know. That's an outstanding thing to have and to bring to the Chargers. We're looking forward to it."

On preparing for Day 3:

HORTIZ: "We'll get in there, the scouts. We'll find out who they really have that passion for. I already know most of those answers. Our scouts have done a phenomenal job throughout the entire process of just being open, being honest, voicing their opinions, showing their passion about the players they love and bringing all the information to the table. We're going to talk through it again tonight and, really, just kind of set the board up to attack tomorrow, you know? With an enthusiasm...."

HARBAUGH: "Unknown to mankind!"

HORTIZ: "It's a fun process because you really kind of look at what's left on the board. Everyone's board across the league has guys sticking out like a sore thumb. Probably, all of those boards have half of those guys on those boards up there. We'll see how the draft plays out early on, but what you want to do as scouts and player personnel and coaches, you want to find the guys that we have conviction about at all levels. That's what we're going to do. We'll talk through it. We'll talk through it tonight. Talk through it tomorrow. Talk through it during the draft as it's going."

On being back in a draft room:

HARBAUGH: "It's been tremendous. I get pretty emotional every year, even when I was in college, when the draft comes around and I'd go to the combine. It's dreams being fulfilled. I remember what it was like when I was a player. When you coach the guys, that's what it's like. Getting to know everybody that's come through or that I've met — not just at Michigan, but everybody. Every guy. I just want to say, 'Hey, give me a big hug. You're a tremendous competitor and person.' We welcome that here at the Chargers. It's been great. I didn't think the NFL could get any more popular, any bigger back when I was in the NFL nine years ago, but it has. It's like, doubled. Two-X'd in terms of popularity. Maybe even three. It's just super exciting to be part of."

On if he received a text from his brother, Ravens Head Coach John Harbaugh:

HARBAUGH: "Yeah, a couple."

On if his brother gave a 'thumbs up' to any of the picks made by the Chargers:

HARBAUGH: "He did. I said, 'Right back at you.' The guys he got, that Baltimore got, were really good picks. I know he wouldn't say it if he didn't think it. That the text on both Junior [Colson] and Ladd [McConkey]. He said Ladd was a big-time competitor. On Junior, he said he just loved his tape."